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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000270

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SENSITIVE

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV KPAQ PHUM CG

SUBJECT: JED GOES PUBLIC WITH REPORT ABOUT KILLING OF JOURNALIST

REF: A) 05 Kinshasa 2024

- B) 05 Kinshasa 1938
- C) 05 Kinshasa 1862

Sensitive But Unclassified. Not for Internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A report by Congolese NGO Journaliste en Danger (JED) purports to tie the murder last November of journalist/political adviser Franck Ngoye Kangundu to PPRD party politics. JED's President and General Secretary have gone underground, following threats supposedly linked to JED's investigation. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists and France-based Reporters Sans Frontiers have taken up JED's call for an independent investigation. The Interior Minister, meanwhile, has reportedly filed a defamation suit. It is far from sure an independent inquiry would support JED's implication that this is a matter of a murderous cover-up or embezzlement of state funds. What is clear in the JED report is the extent to which the press is manipulated and corrupted by politics. End Summary.

"Le Soft International" Breaks the Story

¶2. (U) In its report - excerpted in the weekly "Le Soft International" on February 8 (and again on February 13), and carried on its website (www.jed-afrigue.org) since February 14 -- JED maintains that the killing of Franck Ngoye Kangundu and his wife Helene Paka was not a botched robbery attempt, as apparently claimed by authorities (reflets). JED suggests, rather, that Kangundu was killed before he could reveal information regarding either the transfer of large funds abroad, and/or a power struggle within the PPRD party of Joseph Kabila, in the province of Bandundu.

¶3. (U) The PPRD contest for influence in Bandundu is not news, and would seem to involve current Interior Minister Theophile Mbemba, former Kinshasa governor Jean Kimbunda Mudikela, and PPRD Deputy Secretary General Marie-Ange Lukiana Mufwancol. On the day he died, Franck Kangundu reported having received incriminating documents, possibly involving embezzlement of large funds, from Liyolo Kimbe, a well-known sculptor. All are from Bandundu Province, including Franck Kangundu, who moonlighted over the years as a public affairs adviser to Mbemba and then to Lukiana, while working as political editor to the daily "Reference Plus," and slanting stories in their favor (ref C).

¶4. (SBU) In its report, Journaliste en Danger (JED) makes much of the coincidence that last November 2, virtually the same day of the murder of Kangundu and his wife, journalist Patrice Booto was arrested. Booto published an off-the-wall story in September alleging that President Joseph Kabila contributed USD 30 million from the DRC treasury to educational establishments in Tanzania, at a time when teachers were striking in the DRC for lack of pay. The prosecutor of the State Security Court is seeking a sentence of 12 months imprisonment against Booto for publishing false information and for defaming the president and government.

¶5. (SBU) In prior meetings, JED President Donat M'Baya Tshimanga told PAO that the regularly phlegmatic Joseph

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Kabila reportedly exploded in anger upon hearing the allegation made by Booto. While averring that \$30 million was a totally unbelievable amount, Donat M'Baya told PAO there might have been a donation from personal funds. (The young Kabila attended school in Tanzania.) The JED report seems to suggest, then, that Franck Kangundu's "documents" could have had elements related to this story.

JED in Hiding

16. (SBU) Given the alleged death threats following the release of JED's annual report in December (ref A), JED president Donat M'Baya and JED Secretary General Tshivis Tshivuadi have reportedly gone into hiding

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since the "Le Soft" publication of their findings on February 8. On February 16, we received an e-mail, seemingly from JED President M'Baya, saying he and Tshivis are waiting it out in Brazzaville. He says he

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has been summoned to appear before the police in Kinshasa on February 17. His lawyer will go instead, according to the e-mail. French RFI radio reported on February 17 about the precautions being taken by the JED leaders.

Radio Okapi Tries to Elucidate

17. (U) The popular "Dialogue entre Congolais" political talk show on UN Radio Okapi tackled this matter on February 13. None of those mentioned in the JED report agreed to appear on the air. Instead, the Africa Directors of both the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Sans Frontiers were interviewed. (JED is a chapter of the latter. The CPJ, for its part, spoke out against the initial threats made against JED in December.) Both called upon GDRC Vice President for Security Ruberwa to make good on his promise, made in early November, to mount a thorough investigation into the Kangundu murders (ref B). The CPJ published an open Protest Letter it sent to President Kabila on February 10, calling for an independent inquiry and for assurances for the safety of JED staff. Meanwhile, Interior Minister Mbemba has reportedly lodged a defamation suit.

Comment

18. (SBU) While much of the JED analysis about the politics of the Kangundu murders is tenuous and far-fetched, the JED report is a credible indictment of the many Congolese reporters and editors who sully their profession by selling stories and editorial slants for favors, as Franck Kangundu reportedly did.

19. (SBU) Meanwhile, absent a credible investigation, the sky seems to be the limit on speculating about the Kangundu case and its consequences. In its report, JED notes bitterly that Franck Kangungu is the sixth journalist killed in the Congo in ten years, and none of these cases has been brought to trial. The Reporters Sans Frontiers Africa Director suggested on Radio Okapi that further bloodshed involving a journalist (or a JED staff member) could negatively impact on peaceful elections. Journalists need some reassurance about free press in the DRC. In conversations with Congolese journalists, especially since early November, the climate of intimidation is frequently mentioned as their main concern. Making ends meet comes in second. In its weekly meeting February 16, CIAT members agreed to raise concerns arising from these incidents at the next meeting of the Espace Presidentiel.

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